



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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WSDA offers workshops on cheese processing business

OLYMPIA – The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) is looking for the next Kurt Beecher Dammeier or Kelli Estrella.

Dammeier, of Beecher's Handmade Cheese in Seattle, and Estrella, of Estrella Family Creamery in Montesano, are successful entrepreneurs who have launched artisan cheese businesses within the last two years. WSDA is co-sponsoring two seminars for dairy farmers who want to learn more about the specialty cheese business.

The Dairy Farm and Specialty Cheese Processing Risk Management Seminar will offer information and assistance to small and medium-size dairy producers, small-scale specialty cheese processors or persons interested in starting a small-scale specialty cheese processing business. It's sponsored by WSDA and the USDA Western Center for Risk Management Education.

Workshops on both sides of the state are scheduled for late April. The first, on April 26, will be in Yakima. The second will be in Arlington on April 28. Both will be from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

"This is for people who are seriously interested in going into the (cheese-making) business," said Linda Condon, Food Safety Program specialist for WSDA. "The seminar will let them know all the requirements to get to the point of actually processing cheese."

In 2004 Washington lost 36 dairies, leaving only 560 in the state. Condon said it was knowing those alarming statistics, combined with the story behind Beecher's Handmade Cheese in Seattle's Pike Place Market, that gave her the idea for the specialty cheese processing seminar. Kurt Beecher Dammeier began his successful cheese-making business in late 2003 after he met a local dairy farmer who was interested in making cheese instead of selling his milk to a large milk producer. Since then, several other Washington dairies have gone into the specialty cheese business.

The WSDA/USDA-sponsored seminars will cover effective risk management tools for business planning, safe food handling and processing, bio-security and food security, food recall preparedness, negotiating techniques and marketing strategies for specialty cheese products.

To register, contact Michelle Lucero, WSDA food safety technician, at 360-902-1967, or mlucero@agr.wa.gov.

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